



STATE OF CONNECTICUT • COUNTY OF TOLLAND  
INCORPORATED 1786

# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187

## BOARD OF FINANCE

ROBERT K. PAGANI  
Chairman

RICHARD J. CLEARY  
ROBERT J. CLEMENTS  
MARK A. JOYSE  
BARRY C. PINTO  
ALBERT S. WACHSMAN

## PUBLIC HEARING TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2006 HIGH SCHOOL

**Members Present:** Robert Pagani-Chairman, Richard Cleary, Robert Clements, Mark Joyse, Barry Pinto, Albert Wachsman

Chairman Robert Pagani opened the hearing at 8:00 pm.

In his opening statement the Chairman introduced the Board of Finance members. He stated that the schools are full, Crystal Lake School is scheduled to be remodeled, and the Middle School is to capacity. He asked how long can the Town use band aids and study halls to alleviate the problems. He stated that the Town has been deficient in servicing its Senior Citizen's. In the last budget the Plan of Conservation and Development was funded, and the Board of Selectmen has approved a plan to update developer's fees. The Board of Finance is prepared to support Open Space and Farm Preservation, but that they are waiting for the Conservation Commission to present a plan for preserving land and land purchases. The Public Works Department equipment replacements, which have been deferred year after year are included in this budget. The State continues to place mandates on the Towns with no funding, one of which is a new special education mandate. He thanked Rep. Graziani for being instrumental in helping Ellington acquire a \$25,000 grant which will be used to fund the TV studio at the High School. The Department of Environment Protection has asked that towns set up a Flood and Erosion Control Board which will be given a budget of \$10,000 in this year. The budget is on the town website as well as at the Library for review.

### Overview of Budgets

The General Government budget increased by 8.64% due to increased utility costs, fuel costs and salaries. Debt Service decreased 3.2%. The Board of Education has asked for an 11.1% increase over last year's funded budget which is also due to utilities and salaries. Capital Outlay shows a 258.69% increase over last year; however \$2.5 million is to be funded through bonding or leasing which will not put the total financial burden in one year. The Firehouse project for \$1,185,000 will be bonded. The DPW Dump Trucks, Sweeper and Roadside Mower will be leased over 5 years as well as the Engine Tanker for Center Firehouse and BOE Student Technology.

The Chairman then opened the floor for questions.

A mill rate of 28.4 is shown as needed to fund the budget as it has been presented tonight with the values from the revaluation. Mr. Pagani told the audience that on the website the Finance Officer had made comparisons of properties from various areas of town based on this 28.4 mill rate and last year's actual taxes. The costs for vehicles went down and offset some of the increase in real estate taxes.

The question of what the mill rate would be on this year's budget based on the new revaluation values was asked. It was figured out to be 22.8 mills.

A resident stated that he had received a mailing from Senator LeBeau's office stating the the Town of Ellington would be getting an increase of \$200,000 in state funding. Mr. Pagani stated that the Town gets their information from CCM and the projected funding amount is \$8,352,607 which includes ECS, adult education and transportation.

A resident asked if the Board of Education goes out for proposals for Health Insurance when the contract comes up. Mr. Roberson stated that through collective bargaining they iron that out. It was brought up that the Town of Tolland changed their program and Blue Cross came back with lower premiums. One resident stated that the Town of E. Windsor renegotiated a 4% increase in health insurance and are looking at locking in fuel and electricity purchasing. A resident stated that the industry standard for health insurance increases is 6-12%. Mr. Roberson stated that when they negotiate the teachers' contract, the health insurance benefits are included. A resident asked that the Board of Education not be complacent since the health insurance business is very competitive. Mr. Clements stated that it is hard to convince the unions to change insurance carriers and that the Board of Education works hard in negotiations to increase participation amounts to keep costs down. Mr. Roberson also stated that the teachers have indicated that they are willing to look at other insurance plans and they are concerned about the costs to the taxpayers. This year's contract negotiations will begin in July 06 for a new three year contract effective July 07.

A resident asked if the Board of Finance endorses this budget as it stands. Mr. Pagani stated that they will deliberate on the budgets on April 25 and 26 and make any adjustments as they feel necessary at that time.

The BOE was asked if this budget adds back any services. Mr. Roberson stated that it brings back the deferred staffing positions from last year's budget request. It does not add back any new services. Pay for play will continue as it was started last year.

Mr. Willett stated that the people dressed in red support the schools. Last year's budget reductions were devastating to the system. 85% of CT towns spend more than Ellington on student education. He stated that he appreciated the Board of Finance and Board of Education's efforts. Several residents stated that the teachers in the Ellington school system were phenomenal and that the Town needs to invest in their children.

Student teacher ratios are good in the K-3 grades. Grade 4, 5, 6, Middle School and High School are falling short. Dr. Packman stated that being 142 in towns for funding does not include the budget cuts from last year. Ellington will be even lower when that is taken into account. Test scores for students have been good, but they are starting to dip and if the school funding does not recover, the education of Ellington students will be in jeopardy compared to our neighboring towns.

A resident stated that some towns ask their department heads to hold their budget increases to a certain percentage. Mr. Pagani stated that each year the Board of Finance have asked that budget increases be held to 1% plus salaries.

A resident asked if there were enough special education teachers at this time, and Mr. Brettschnieder stated that there were.

Several residents stated that they wanted to see the student to teacher ratio reduced.

One resident asked if the late time for this meeting was the reason that there were few senior citizens in the audience. Mr. Burns spoke and stated that if the Board of Finance does their job well, the senior citizen's will not complain. Mr. Pagani stated that the Superintendent of School and he have met with senior citizens' at the Senior Center to explain the budgets on numerous occasions. He also stated that the Board of Finance members are volunteers and he would not ask them to meet on weekends. The Public Hearings and Board of Finance meetings have always been held at 8 pm.

Mr. Feldman stated that society needs to change when it comes to its senior citizen's and the problem with the town's development starts with Planning and Zoning. He was also recognized as being this year's fireman of the year.

The question of the new firehouse came up, and Chief Varney stated that the additional facility is needed in the south end of town for parking apparatus that is now left outside and to reduce response time. It now takes 15 minutes to get from one end of town to the other and that can be critical. Chief Varney stated that by being a volunteer fire department the town is saving over \$4 million in salaries. Other towns function as one department with several different locations.

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A resident stated that the Community Voice Channel gives direct access to broadcast town meetings and that the First Selectman and Chairman of the BOE have been in contact with Comcast regarding the installation of the two lines that will make this happen.

Mr. Frederick stated that the circuit breaker for senior citizens has an income limit too low. Mr. Pagani stated that it is set by the legislature.

Mr. Thiesing stated that he supports the new fire station and recommended that the town look into combining the health insurance for the education and general government employees. He asked what the \$1 million increase in salaries was for and was told it was a combination of contractual salary increases and benefits.

Chairman Pagani closed the hearing at 10:10 pm.

Submitted by   
Lori Smith, Clerk